

Foreign Policy Legacy Issues

- Liberal and Romantic Perspectives

Foreign policy is, probably more than any other policy in Serbia, burdened with problems left behind by Milošević. Problems such as The Hague, Kosovo and relations between Serbia and Montenegro in the context of the association with the European Union create deep divisions in the public. The Jefferson Institute decided to address these issues from an academic perspective in order to identify the intellectual traditions beneath this division.

The Institute asked Mr. Ivo Visković, Professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences and Mr. Aleksandar Simić, adviser to the Serbian Prime Minister, to each prepare an article presenting their views on foreign policy and on the above mentioned issues. These articles were a motive to organize a discussion, held in the form of a roundtable on December 24, 2004.

The discussion showed that there are at least two approaches to foreign policy. The first one is based on a rational and liberal orientation, while the other formulates its goals by referring to intellectual tradition of 19th century Romanticism by which foreign policy goals are more subject to emotions.

The rift in the conceptualization of foreign policy extends to all topics discussed on that occasion. From the romantic point of view, it may be said that Kosovo should remain the part of Serbia for emotional reasons. Such a position does not enable a coherent answer to the question often asked from the rational perspective. That is, what would happen if that foreign policy goal, i.e. the return of Kosovo to Serbian sovereignty, were fully accomplished? The Government seems not to have the capacity to manage the consequences of success in this goal even if it were achieved.

The question of cooperation with the Hague Tribunal is also often treated in the public as

a question of cooperation with a political tribunal with deficient procedures. Thus, one part of the political elite refuses cooperation with The Hague, while the current Government advocates not full, but partial cooperation. The Government puts partial cooperation even in front of the principle of legalism, as it persistently violates the legislation that mandates full cooperation.

The Hague Tribunal was established because the domestic courts of countries at war in the period 1991-1999 were not able to prosecute war crimes fairly. The question of cooperation with the Hague Tribunal remains an internal question and its character largely derives from the fact that a large portion of the Serbian political elite is not able to face war crimes committed by Serbs. The Romantics' resistance to cooperation with The Hague is, on the other hand, based in an externalization of the issue focusing on the inadequacies of the tribunal. The real question, as presented by liberals, is not whether the government should cooperate with The Hague, but what Serbia should do with regard to the issue of war crimes, i.e. whether the government is ready to accept that crimes occurred and to prosecute the suspects.

Those in favor of liberal and rationally oriented foreign policy see the State Union of Serbia & Montenegro as a means for faster integration of the Republics of Serbia and the Republic of Montenegro into the European Union. This accelerated integration was the Union's initial and primary purpose. Both states have already invested too much time passing legislation that is not observed and establishing arrangements that do not work. If the governments of Serbia and Montenegro had not been forced to negotiate the Belgrade Agreement, the Constitutional Charter and the Action Plan, the Feasibility Study would have most probably been finished, and perhaps even negotiations on the

Stabilization and Association Agreement would have been completed. The disintegration of a dysfunctional State Union is therefore acceptable from a liberal and rational point of view.

Romantics, however, see the State Union as something more than a mere means that enables faster integration with EU. They believe that the State Union gives a possibility for two brotherly nations to live together. Some romantics, representatives of which were not present at the roundtable, go so far as to directly deny the distinctiveness of the Montenegrin nation. Hence, it is not a surprise that although the State Union has turned into an obstacle for faster integration, traditionalists (which prevail in the Serbian government today), continue to insist on its preservation. The point is actually that for traditionalists, European integration is not a priority, as was explicitly stressed by one participant who could be said to belong to the traditional-romantic discourse.

This last conclusion is of great importance for the discussion on the Serbian foreign policy, as well as on the general political course of Serbia after the 2000 changes. The discussion on foreign policy actually showed fundamental differences in the understanding of national interests. Romantics viewed national interest as fundamentally based in domestic political stability. Liberals see national security as fundamentally based in Europeanization. Although it is not likely that the two schools of opinion on our foreign policy would find their common points, it might be said that further progress of Serbia toward the European Union would eventually enable their mutual differences to diminish. Indeed even today, the points of harmony in the foreign policy discourse are centered where domestic political harmony and Europeanization are mutually reinforcing.

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